

Testimony of Jeanne Milstein, Child Advocate
In Support of
Raised Bill No. 877, An Act Implementing The Recommendations Of The Program
Review And Investigations Committee Concerning The Department Of Children And
Families
February 19, 2009

Good morning Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and members of the Select Committee on Children. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today **in support of Raised Bill No. 877, An Act Implementing The Recommendations Of The Program Review And Investigations Committee Concerning The Department Of Children And Families**

I would like to preface my testimony by thanking the Program Review and Investigations Committee (PRIC) for their commitment to the children of our state. The "DCF Monitoring and Evaluation" report ("PRIC Report"), issued in December 2007, is critical to our collective understanding of the functioning of the Department of Children and Families. The findings and recommendations are extensive. A number of findings are of significant concern:

- There is no single compilation of all of the goals within the agency, across all mandate areas and programs. (p. 148)
- While DCF participates in the development of a statewide plan for the delivery of mental health services, as required by federal law, and that plan includes goals and measures, to plan does not appear to be used by DCF as a strategic guide for providing services. (p. 11)
- While there are pockets of strength regarding quality assurance, there are also major gaps including ineffective use of findings from internal and external evaluations and no compilation or comparison of results data from all sources. (p. 147)
- Performance-based contracting is ineffective: expectations are not explicit; where expectations are explicit, data is sometimes not submitted by the provider; and there is little accountability and knowledge of whether a provider is meeting contract expectations and rarely consequences when they do not. (p. 160-161)
- DCF monitoring of providers and implementation of contract requirements is haphazard at best, often relying on the interest and time available of the program lead, ranging from conscientious to vacant position. (p. 167)

While these findings are disappointing, they are not surprising. The findings and recommendations are consistent with the findings and recommendations in numerous reports issued by the Child Advocate over many years. These findings speak to the need to improve DCF's internal quality assurance activities, improve responsiveness to internal and external investigations and evaluations, set out clear expectations for

providers and staff, to develop and implement a meaningful strategic plan, and to integrate the work of the various bureaus.

As a consolidated children's agency, DCF's mandates are broad and far-reaching. While its mandate to care for and protect children who are abused and neglected is most often highlighted, DCF is equally mandated to serve as the lead mental health and juvenile justice agency for all of Connecticut's children. DCF also is responsible for leadership related to prevention initiatives. In testimony and other public forums, I have shared evidence that DCF's mandates of children's mental health, juvenile justice and prevention, and the everyday practice related to those mandates, are disconnected from its child protection work and from one another. The investigations and evaluations completed by my office have repeatedly demonstrated a lack of systemic integration and accountability.

I urge you not only to move forward Raised Bill 877 but also to remain vigilant and take every step necessary to ensure that all of the recommendations put forth in this year's study are implemented and that DCF is held accountable to the residents of this state.

Raised Bill No. 877 calls for the development of single, comprehensive strategic plan for meeting the needs of children and families served by the department and that progress reports on implementation be provided regularly to the State Advisory Council, the Governor and the Legislature. A comprehensive strategic plan with measurable goals and outcomes is critical to ending the fragmentation that has plagued the agency. However, it is equally vital that any outcome measures focus on quality, not just quantity. Outcome measures must answer one vital question: are children better off because of the state's decision to intervene in their lives?

We need look no further than the Juan F. outcome measures to understand the importance of the focus of outcome measures. While DCF has achieved compliance with most of the 22 outcome measures, most of these measures focus on timeliness of particular actions, rather than the quality of those actions. While process and timeliness are important, the quality of intervention is equally important. I urge all of you to take a closer look at the most recent Juan F. quarterly report¹ and shift the focus from the numbers and chart to what the report actually tells us about practice. While compliance with outcome measures 3 and 15 have improved, to 62.3% on "Treatment Planning" and 52.8% in "Needs Met", the agency continues to struggle with fundamentals of good case practice. The report notes the following significant findings:

- Specific and time-limited action steps and goals remain the key problem areas for the Department and the level of provider input, family engagement and participation of key stakeholders (youths, mothers, fathers, providers, and attorneys) in both the development of the treatment plan and attendance at the Administrative Case Review (ACR) must improve. p. 3.

¹ The full Juan F. Quarterly Report for the third quarter of 2008 can be found at http://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/2008-12-16_third_quarter_monitoring_report.pdf

- The predominant issues impacting children's needs being addressed involve the lack of appropriate foster and adoptive homes, wait-lists for community based services, discharge delays from the continuum of treatment/placement programs, lack of appropriate in-state residential services for specialized populations of children, delays in referrals to needed services, and the refusal of services by parents and/or children. Gridlock within the continuum of treatment/placement services remains a constant obstacle to fully addressing the needs of children. Some improvement in the area of discharge delays from hospital emergency departments was noted. p. 3.

So, a strategic plan that includes goals and measures that will inform us about whether children are better off as a result of DCF's intervention is vital.

Raised Bill No. 877 also seeks to enhance the role of the State Advisory Council (SAC) by requiring funding and administrative support and facilitating public participation. I ask you to consider re-examining the composition of the current SAC to determine whether its composition should be modified. For example, you may wish to include in the SAC members of the Connecticut Behavioral Health Advisory Council, which the report recommends be incorporated into the SAC, the Office of the Child Advocate, the Chief Child Protection Attorney, and other persons with expertise in children's mental health, child development, juvenile justice, substance abuse in children and youth, and prevention.

I strongly support the provision of Raised Bill No. 877 that would require DCF or any other state agency cited in a report conducted by my office, including reports of the Child Fatality Review Panel, to submit a written response to the report and recommendations not later than 60 days after the receipt of the report. The bill requires that the response include proposed corrective actions to address identified problems and time frames for implementation of improvements. The investigations done by my office expose significant gaps in policies, procedures or protocols of DCF or other state funded entities and make recommendations for systemic change. Requiring a written response not only to my office, but also to the General Assembly and the Governor, would provide greater accountability.

For all of these reasons, I urge you to support Raised Bill No. 877, An Act Implementing The Recommendations Of The Program Review And Investigations Committee Concerning The Department Of Children And Families.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.